The Play of Power and Politics: A Study of Select Post - Independence Indian English Plays

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of

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by

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Abstract

In a democratic country like India, elected representatives are entrusted with making decisions for the welfare of society. But some of them misuse their authority for personal benefits, leading to the neglect of the populace's needs. This misuse exacerbates existing societal hierarchies, perpetuating the exploitation of the underprivileged and reinforcing gender biases, violence, and entrenched atrocities within the societal norms. The research delves into the portrayal of power and politics in post-independence Indian English plays, focusing on the chosen plays of first generation post-independence playwrights namely *Girish Karnad* (1938-2019), *Badal Sircar* (1925- 2011), *Vijay Tendulkar* (1928-2008) and *Habib Tanvir* (1923-2009). Through an examination of *Tughlaq* (1964), *Tale Danda* (1990), *Encounter in Umbugland* (1968), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Bhoma* (1974), *Procession* (1974)**,** *Charandas Chor* (1975) and *The Living Tale of Hirma* (1985), this research sheds light on the intricate dynamics of political representation and its impact on the society. Drawing from various literary theories like Postcolonialism, Feminism, Postmodernism, Marxism, Psychological and Sociological theories of power, the analysis seeks to unravel the underlying themes and nuances embedded within the plays. By digging into the characters, plot structures, and socio-political contexts of the chosen plays, the research endeavours to provide a comprehensive understanding of how power manifests and influences societal dynamics in post-independence India.

Keywords: Power, Politics, Modern Indian English Drama, Post-independence, Plays.

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Introduction

The emergence of Indian English plays came into being with British efforts to introduce English to India with the aim of anglicizing the nation. But this resulted in the acquisition of the language by the Indians. While the British were mesmerized by Oriental beauty, Indians found themselves enchanted by the process of language assimilation. The genesis of Indian English drama is attributed to *Krishna Mohan Banerji,* who debuted *The Persecuted*. However, it was the seminal work of Bengali writer *Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Is This Civilization* (1871) that marked the true commencement of this literary journey. Dutt's contribution sets the stage for a rich tradition of literary expression in the English language within the Indian context.

Examining the trajectory of Indian theatre, it becomes evident that its historical narrative has often overshadowed other perspectives. Traditionally, it has been classified into three eras: the Ancient period, characterised by Sanskrit texts; the Medieval era marked by the proliferation of folk and traditional elements; and the Modern era representing contemporary theatrical expressions.
After the independence of India, a fervent desire aroused to create a distinct identity which is free from colonial traces. The playwrights of this era sought to foreground Indianness by rejuvenating pre-modern elements. The first generation of post-independence playwrights, including Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, and Habib Tanvir, spearheaded the Theatre of Roots Movement (1960s-1980s). Their objective was to imbue Indian theatre with universal appeal by reviving indigenous folk traditions. However, the initial idealism of the new nation gradually paved the way to disillusionment, as the lofty promises of societal betterment remained largely unfulfilled. The exercisers of power often yielded to self-serving agendas, dampening the spirit of progress and hindering the realisation of collective goals of the masses.

In general, power is defined as an ability to influence someone else's behaviour or course of events. On the other hand, politics is defined as making decisions by those who have power. In a sense one can imply that there seems a connection between the two as if there is power there exists politics also but not the vice-versa. Over the course of time, different theorists have laid down different understandings of power. There are conventional theories which consist of Liberal theory- power lies with people, Marxist Theory- power lies with the high class, Elitist Theory- power lies with the elite class of the society, Pluralist Theory- power lies with the interest group. Also, the unconventional theories of power like Antonio Gramsci's Hegemony, Hannah Arendt' acting with consent, Louis Althusser's Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus and Michael Foucault's micro

theory of power. Everyone has defined power and its relation with society in a different way. The research will tend to explain the different perspectives of power as accounted by various theorists but the research will use the said theories to build on the idea of how power works in a society and how it affects the common people.

Marxist theory offers a critical analysis of power dynamics, focusing on the inherent conflict between social classes. According to Marxists, power is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the ruling class that controls the means of production. This class exploits the proletariat, maintaining a cycle of oppression and subjugation.

Postmodernist theorists, notably Michel Foucault, challenge traditional conceptions of power by emphasising on its pervasive and multidirectional nature. Foucault contends that power is not held by specific individuals or institutions but is dispersed throughout society, operating through sovereign power, which manifests through physical violence; disciplinary power, characterised by constant surveillance; and biopolitics, which regulates populations by controlling basic human features.

Postcolonial theory explores the enduring legacy of colonialism and its impact on contemporary societies. It examines the power dynamics between colonists and colonisers, highlighting the exploitation and marginalisation of non-white races during colonial rule.

Psychological theory looks at the way how mind, instincts work. There are different theories propounded by various theorists to understand the complex phenomena by looking at unique perspectives.

Feminist theory looks at the way patriarchy works in a society. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir encapsulates the phenomenon in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) with her assertion that ‘one is not born a woman, but one becomes a woman.’ Embedded within the existential dialogue is a resounding call for gender equality, asserting that there should be no inherent difference between a man and a woman. Daly Mary, an American feminist theologian, posits that a woman's freedom is intricately tied to her connection with nature and her body, underscoring the importance of acknowledging and embracing these intrinsic qualities. While the existential and essentialist debates present differing views on womanhood, they converge on a central theme – the quest for women's freedom from societal constraints.

What distinguishes these playwrights is their commitment to indigenous languages. Each of the four selected playwrights pens their works in their regional dialect, subsequently translated into English by either themselves or others to broaden their audience reach.

Girish Karnad, a prominent *Kannada* writer, is highly regarded in Indian literature for his significant contributions to drama. His select plays are known for blending historical depth with contemporary relevance and offer sharp commentary on the dynamics of power and politics. *Tughlaq* (1964), one of Karnad's most notable works, talks about the complexities of governance through the life of 14th century ruler *Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq*. Karnad depicts the ruler's journey from idealism to tyranny, reflecting on political corruption and moral ambiguity. The play parallels the disillusionment during the era of Nehru's rule, resonating with contemporary socio-political realities. *Tale Danda* (1990) is set against the backdrop of *Basavanna's* reformist movement and focuses upon the conflicts that exist within the majority religion thus condemning the conservative and societal norms. Through this, Karnad express power driven and manipulative techniques of being, which lead to social turmoil and challenges the vision of an egalitarian society.

Vijay Tendulkar, a significant figure in *Marathi* literature, emerges as a verbal advocate of feminist thought through his works. His historical play *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972) criticizes the dominance of *Brahmins* and exposes the discrimination based on gender that exists within the society. Another play, *Encounter in Umbugland* (1968) draws parallels to contemporary Indian politics through the character of *Princess Vijaya*, offering a cautionary narrative about political manipulation and the downfall of democratic values. His views on power dynamics underscores the enduring pertinent of his work.

A leading *Bengali* writer and founder of Third theatre[1], Badal Sircar revolutionized Indian English drama with his inventive approach. His play *Bhoma* (1974) examines the challenges faced by rural peasants and the de-humanizing effects of systemic methods which urges the notable communities to reclaim agency and resist subjugation. Through the use of fragmented scenes, Sircar vividly portrays the requirement of social change and political reform or dynamics. The play *Procession* (1974) exposes the negligence of government in providing the basic needs to working class. It is set in Kolkata and serves as an outcry for social justice and political answerability. This depiction of social decay resembles with contemporary audiences and thus provide an instant reflection on prevalent injustices.

Habib Tanvir is an enormously renowned *Hindi* writer who is celebrated for rejuvenating the folk traditions or culture in Indian theatre. He explores power dynamics and political representation in

[1] Third theatre- Through this theatre, Bada Sircar rejects the notion of proscenium theatre which creates a boundary between audience and the spectator. He emphasizes on the return to the folk elements and makes Indian theatre universal in its appeal.

his plays. *Charandas Chor* (1975) expresses the moral contrary of a corrupt society by using a tragicomic storytelling to unravel the hypocrisies of power and the strength of the human spirit through the character of Charandas. Moreover, other play *The Living Tale of Hirma* (1985) endeavours to search into the clash between tradition and modernity in tribal life and navigates the tensions among cultural identity, social change and political inference. His portrayal of tribal rituals underscores the complexities of cultural assimilation and social transformation which serves as a piteous reminder of the struggle for autonomy and self-determination.

Review of Literature

In the article, ‘Theatres in India’ (1989), Girish Karnad reflects on the significance of theatre in India and its ability to capture the diverse facets of society. He discusses the emergence of realism in Indian theatre during the 1930s, prompted by the inadequacies of traditional natak [2]companies and the fervour for social reform during the independence movement. The playwrights of this era sought to address societal issues and demonstrate India's readiness for independence. Karnad also acknowledges the impact of Western theatre on Indian drama, particularly in the portrayal of domestic settings, revealing a limitation in the analytical approach of Indian playwrights. Drawing from personal experience, Karnad shares insights into his own play, influenced by the works of Strindberg and Anouilh, which culminated in a tragic narrative. He touches upon the political scenario of the 1960s, highlighting the growing awareness of political power among the electorate. Karnad discusses the challenges he faced in reconciling personal anxieties and societal expectations in his writing, shedding light on the complexities of artistic expression. Overall, the article delves into the evolution of realism in Indian theatre, its interaction with Western influences, and Karnad's personal journey as a playwright.

In the article ‘Three concepts of power: Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas’ (2023), Gerd Christensen delves into the concept of power as viewed through the lenses of three prominent social theorists: Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault. The article examines the varied interpretations of power, encompassing its role as both a suppressive force and a non-possessed, productive entity. Through an analysis of philosophical themes such as dualism, reductionism, determinism, autonomy, truth, normativity, and relativism, the paper explores how these conceptions shape our understanding of power within each theoretical framework. Moreover, it underscores the implications of these perspectives for educational researchers, particularly in terms of analysing conflicts and gaining insights into the workings of the world. Overall, Christensen's article offers a thorough examination of power as elucidated by Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault, emphasizing its significance within the realm of educational research.

In the article ‘Soveriegn Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: How to make sense of Foucaukt's Conceptualization of Power Mechanisms’ (2019), Eray Alim discusses Michel Foucault's analysis of power mechanisms within modern Western societies, focusing on sovereign authority, disciplinary

[2] Natak- it is called drama in English.

mechanisms, and biopolitics. These mechanisms have evolved over time and serve distinct functions within societal administration. Biopower, the most recent iteration, is characterized by its constructive and productive nature, shaping societies through the management of populations. Despite the emergence of biopower, sovereign and disciplinary mechanisms remain relevant in pursuing biopolitical goals. Foucault emphasizes the interplay between these three forms of power, which work in tandem to govern populations. He critiques an exclusive focus on disciplinary techniques, advocating for an examination of practices rather than institutions and cautioning against overemphasizing the role of the state. While Foucault maintains a critical distance from the concept of the state, he acknowledges its structural influence rather than its tangible existence. Additionally, Foucault highlights the exploitation of eroticization for economic and ideological purposes, noting a shift from controlling bodies and desires to stimulating them.

In their work ‘Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power, and Biopower: Resisting Power with Resistance’ (2014), Mona Lilja and Stellan Vinthagen explore the dynamic between power and resistance through the framework of Foucault's 'triangle' of power forms: sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower. They argue that while resistance against sovereign power has been extensively studied in contexts such as revolutions, social movements, and terrorism, there is a noticeable dearth of academic inquiry into resistance against biopower and disciplinary power. Resistance against biopower entails diverging from population management policies and institutional norms by embracing alternative behaviours, values, and lifestyles that challenge societal control mechanisms. This renewed interest in resistance studies is closely linked to poststructuralist perspectives and language discourses, which often advocate for resistance as a vehicle for enacting social change and altering power dynamics.

In the second chapter of his thesis titled ‘Contemporary Discourse on Power,’ Javaid Ahmad Lone delves into the multifaceted nature of power in society and its diverse expressions. Lone challenges the notion that power solely entails the direct imposition of one's will onto others, instead highlighting how various systems such as values, religion, productivity, and family contribute to the maintenance of power dynamics. Lone explores Roland Barthes’s "doxa" in mass culture, which he views as a pervasive and often unnoticed force that reinforces ideological stability through cultural codes like proverbs and maxims. Moreover, Lone discusses examples of marginalized ethnicities, such as Negritude and Dalits, who resist discrimination and strive to reclaim and celebrate their identities rooted in shared histories of oppression. He underscores the interconnectedness between theories of hegemony, ideology, and doxa, all of which challenge conventional thinking and underscore the influence of dominant ideas on the masses. Ultimately, Lone acknowledges that power is a complex

and multidimensional concept that transcends the traditional Marxist dichotomy of the privileged and the marginalized.

The chapter titled ‘Theories of Power’ offers a historical overview of power within the social sciences, focusing on prominent theories throughout history. It acknowledges the challenge of defining power, highlighting its contested nature as a fundamental concept. It suggests that theories of empowerment draw inspiration from existing theories of power, utilizing insights from these frameworks to develop their own perspectives on empowerment. The chapter also examines the darker aspects of power, emphasizing how it ensnares both wielders and subjects alike. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration, which posits a duality of structure, is discussed as a critique and extension of Foucault's understanding of power. Giddens contends that power is not only wielded by individuals but also shapes and is shaped by social structures. The contributions of scholars like Lukes and Giddens are noted for their role in emphasizing the importance of power within contemporary sociological discourse. Additionally, early thinkers such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes are credited with shaping modern conceptions of power through their political writings. The chapter also addresses the methodological challenges inherent in studying power relations, including the need to consider institutional perspectives and the development of analytical tools tailored to specific contexts.

In the initial chapter of his thesis titled ‘The Politics of Power,’ Joydeep Bhattacharyya critically assesses the post-Independence narrative of nation-building, statecraft, and governance in India. His aim is to challenge the prevalent discourse of widespread development and uncover underlying issues within the nascent nation-state. Moreover, Bhattacharyya engages with the contemporary political landscape of India, interrogating the conventional perceptions of what is deemed 'normal' and 'legitimate.' The chapter delves into themes such as communal harmony, the prevailing political climate, and the influence of historical events on present-day political narratives. Through an analysis of plays like *Tughlaq*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, and *The Dreams of Tipu*, Bhattacharyya seeks to elucidate the deficiencies and shortcomings within the political culture of the nation-state. Furthermore, he underscores the disillusionment and skepticism stemming from the dissonance between the promises of a brighter future and the lived reality experienced by ordinary citizens post-Independence.

In the article ‘The role of power in social explanation’ (2018), Torsten Menge argues for the necessity of a comprehensive theory of power to elucidate social phenomena. However, he contends that existing approaches fall short in identifying a consistent causal mechanism. Menge discusses three potential strategies for such a theory: the capacity to exert force, access to resources, and collective acceptance.

Yet, he finds that none of these strategies offer a stable causal explanation. This deficiency suggests that the concept of power lacks the coherence required for broad explanatory purposes. Additionally, Menge references Thomas Wartenberg's dynamic perspective on power, which underscores the ongoing reproduction of social structures and their responsiveness to shifts in societal contexts. He also mentions the potential of mid-range theories of power, which focus on specific social-historical contexts and utilize power as a conceptual tool to capture the intricate interplay of causal factors within those contexts.

Objectives of Research

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To trace the evolution of Modern Indian English Drama in post- independence era.
- To comprehend the nature and dimensions of power.
- To explore the intricate relationship between power and politics.
- To analyse the political portrayal of power in selected plays.
- To examine the impact of power on both the dominant and the dominated.

To achieve these objectives the select plays of first generation post-independence playwrights have chosen.

Rationale of Research

The rationale is to study the interconnectedness between power and politics and how they work. While power is an ability to influence someone else's behaviour, politics involves decision making by those who have power. Everyone has experienced power in some way or the other. For instance, a teacher has power over a student, parents have power over children, institutions have power over masses etc. With changing times, power is not limited to physical torture only, but it transcends the boundary because of its evolving nature. New methods of power have emerged in society.

Prior to modern times, physical torture is more visible but this has been replaced by continuous monitoring of people by having CCTV's cameras everywhere. Also, in today's world, advertisements are there which direct the people by controlling their basic human features. Unknowingly people are subject to a certain kind of power which is in the hands of those who make decisions for them.

The research intends to study the narrative strategies employed by chosen first-generation post-independence playwrights to elucidate the presence and impact of power and politics within contemporary society. By examining how power is depicted, negotiated, and contested within these narratives, this study sheds light on the broader socio-cultural contexts and ideological underpinnings that shape theatrical representations of power and politics.

Research Gaps

While previous scholarship has engaged with the analysis and interpretation of the selected plays for their thematic elements, including occasional depictions of physical torture, this research aims to uncover deeper layers of inquiry into the concept of power and its exercise within the plays. Existing studies have provided valuable insights into the socio-political dimensions present in the works of playwrights yet they have largely remained on a surface level examination. This research seeks to address this gap by delving further into the nuanced manifestations of power dynamics, exploring how power operates, influences characters, shapes relationships, and drives narrative trajectories within the theatrical framework. By focusing on the intricacies of power dynamics beyond mere physical manifestations, this study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in post-independence Indian theatre and its reflection of societal power structures.

Research Methodology

The research is based on Qualitative method with use of following parameters:

Close Reading: This method will be focusing on the close reading of select plays. The analysis of the plays might be the same, but the interpretation varies from person to person.

Application of appropriate Literary Theory: Literary Theory is defined as a way in which we explore literature. It helps us to understand a text better and works as an entry gate to a text. Usually, a person's understanding is limited to his/her experience in life, and it is through literary theory that a person can approach a text in multiple ways. The research will discuss various trends in twentieth-century literary theories including Marxism, Postmodernism, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Psychological and Sociological theories of power. It explores the questions of what power is, how it is produced. understood, and its purposes.

Comparative Analysis: This method will be used to compare the plays of different playwrights chosen for this study to build upon the idea as to how power and politics work in a society.

Proposed Chapterisation

The research will be divided into six chapters:

1. Introduction: This chapter lays the context for the opinions that will be described during the course of entire research.
2. The second chapter talks about Girish Karnad as a playwright and how its two historical plays address power and politics.
3. The third chapter talks about Vijay Tendulkar and takes into consideration his two politically enriched plays.
4. The fourth chapter throws light on Badal Sircar as a playwright and talks about his representation of power and politics in his plays.
5. The fifth chapter talks about Habib Tanvir and how his plays focus on the political representation of power.
6. Conclusion: This chapter reflects upon the analysis of select plays and how power affects society and how it is prevalent in contemporary times.

Expected Outcomes

This research attempts to uncover the evolving understandings of power in contemporary society, acknowledging its shifting complexities and challenges. While traditionally defined as physical control wielded by authoritative figures such as monarchs, the contemporary landscape presents a nuanced tapestry of power dynamics. Through a meticulous examination of the select plays, this study expects to illuminate the diverse manifestations of power, transcending conventional paradigms and delving into its multifaceted dimensions. By exploring how power operates beyond traditional hierarchies, this research aims to elucidate the intricate webs in which common people find themselves ensnared. By offering insights into the evolving nature of power dynamics, this study endeavours to contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary societal structures and the myriad ways in which power shapes individual experiences and collective realities.

Delimitations

The eight plays by chosen playwrights have been taken into consideration for this research:

-**Girish Karnad:** *Tuglaq* (1964) and *Tale Danda* (1990)

-**Vijay Tendulkar:** *Encounter in Umbugland* (1968) and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972)

-**Badal Sircar:** *Bhoma* and *Procession* (1974)

- **Habib Tanvir:** *Charandas Chor* (1975) and *The Living Tale of Hirma* (1985)

Also, the description of others works by these playwrights will be used to support the main argument of the research. Different theories of power will also be utilised for the analysis and the interpretation of the plays.

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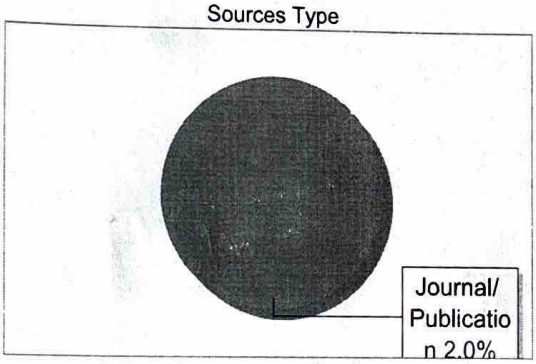

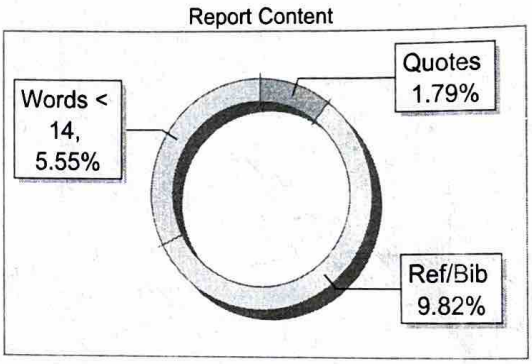

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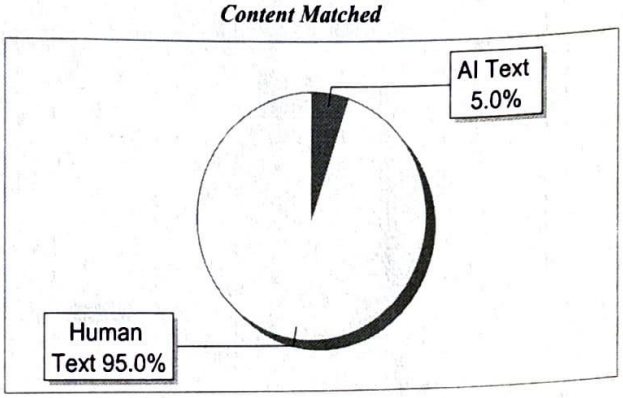

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